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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the components of Wright State University's (WSU's) present teacher preparation program and addresses the changes envisioned with Ohio's recently approved licensure programs. The paper explains how WSU's current program offers field experiences in three phases. Student teachers have the opportunity to work under different conditions in a variety of settings, gaining more teaching time as they gather experience. The paper also presents data from a student teaching survey and examines how best practices in the area of field experiences are being implemented in WSU's teacher preparation program. A survey was distributed to past and current student teachers to assess the impact of the WSU's field experience sequence. Data from 50 surveys indicated that most of the respondents felt positive about their ability to fill the role of a novice classroom teacher following their field experiences. They felt that the cooperating teacher and exposure to the real world of teaching made the program beneficial to them. (Contains 10 references.) (SM)

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Applying "Best Practices" to Preparation of Future Educators Using Exemplary Field Experiences

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Applying "Best Practices" to Preparation of Future Educators

Using Exemplary Field Experiences

Introduction

While field experience components are considered important and powerful aspects of teacher preparation programs, the significance of positive, efficacy building classroom experiences cannot be over emphasized (McIntyre, Byrd, and Fox 1996; Metcalf and Kahlich 1996). Teacher educators often tell students having a less than desirable field experience, that a great deal can be learned about "how not to teach" from weak classroom teachers (Ribich 1995). The overall result is that students come away from such experiences lacking their initial enthusiasm and desire to be an effective teacher. McIntyre, Byrd, and Fox, (1996) state that "the placement of the prospective teacher for both early field experiences is a critical stage in teacher preparation" (p. 173). The same, of course, holds true for later field experiences, including the culminating student teaching or intern experience.

Ribich (1990) echoes the guidelines of learned societies, stating that field experiences should: be initiated as soon as possible in the preserve program; be an integral part of the whole curriculum; be carefully planned and linked to course work; be sequential and developmental; provide opportunities for students to experience a wide range of settings and learners who represent a wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds (p. 37). While often difficult to do, providing preservice teachers with purposefully selected

field experiences that reflect best practices in teaching are perhaps the surest means to guide them to be the innovative, efficacious teachers needed in today's classrooms.

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 1999) recently mandated that teacher preparation programs be held accountable for their preservice teachers enhancing the learning of K-12 students in public schools. This requirement places a new emphasis on the structuring and sequencing of field experiences to ensure that preservice teachers are prepared to work on academic tasks with students, as well as observe and learn about the K-12 classroom environment. It also translates into closer connections between classroom-related assignments for education courses and the work that is done with students in field placements. Ohio requires all teacher preparation programs be accredited by NCATE and mandates that preservice teachers must assist in making a difference in academic achievements of K-12 students. Teacher preparation programs must demonstrate that students are placed in quality field experiences that build a repertoire of effective teaching strategies to compliment content mastery.

In 1990, Goodlad, Soder, and Sirotnik conducted a national study of teacher education programs. Their study concluded that often little or no connection exists between field experiences and education courses. This study also pointed out that a lack of communication between campus faculty and school-based teaching staff can result in course assignments and field

experience expectations being noncomplimentary (Goodlad, Soder, and Sirotnik, 1990). Ideally, course content and assignments should be closely aligned with the complexity and reality of the classroom setting where the preservice student is placed. This congruency should build the framework for the student's professional growth as an emerging educator.

This paper provides an overview of the components of our present teacher preparation program and addresses the changes envisioned with the recently approved licensure programs. Also presented are data from a student teaching survey and how "best practices" in the area of field experiences are being implemented in our teacher preparation programs.

Description of the Present Teacher Preparation Programs

Wright State University (WSU) is a metropolitan state-supported university dedicated to the educational, social, and cultural needs of the Dayton area with an enrollment of 17,000 graduate and undergraduate students. In the present undergraduate program, more traditional in design, field experiences begin with initial observations in classrooms and related introductory courses (classified as Phase I). The Block Phase I requires students to work in classes 1/2 day and take university classes, in the building, the other 1/2 day. The non-block Phase I parallels the academic requirements except that the courses are held on campus. The field placement consists of one full week prior to the term beginning (all day, every day) then 1/2 day a week for the rest of the term. Both Phase I's have 90 hour field experiences and corequisite 30 clinical hour course component, for a total of 120 hours.

Phase II contains a one day a week field component for two terms. This coupled with the corequisite courses and clinical hours totals an additional 180 field hours for students. The Phase II experiences guide the students from the Phase I observational stages to increased involvement in the classroom. In addition to becoming more familiar with classroom management and organization, students are required to work with students, in small and large groups, to help with projects like bulletin boards, to develop lessons with the cooperating teachers, and ultimately to teach those lessons. The next step, Phase III, student teaching or internship (described below in the Professional Educators Program full-time experience). This sequence assists students' progress from teacher preparation program newcomers- to fledglings- to novice teachers.

WSU is especially proud of the Professional Educator Program (PEP). The PEP is the culmination of earlier college efforts as well as the result of membership in John Goodlad's National Network for Educational Renewal and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. Relationships with the above organizations served as a factor in the college becoming one of 18 college and university partners in the Teacher Education initiative of its National Center for Innovation (NCI-EN).

The PEP uses the medical school model that permits a select group of post baccalaurate students to practice the art and science of teaching in a clinical environment. The strength of the program is that the interns experience the total ecology of the school beginning the summer prior to and

concluding the summer following the school year. The interns earn their teaching certificates (licenses) in 15 months. They build on their undergraduate degree to become a certified/licensed Ohio teacher.

The class consists of student interns who are housed in public schools. The intern's cohort group includes persons who have enjoyed professional success in the military, business, and other careers. School teachers who voluntarily complete a workshop serve as clinical faculty members in partnership with Wright State University (WSU). The clinical faculty provide a learning laboratory that is rich in problem solving and collaborative teaching and learning opportunities. These clinical faculty mentors supervise the interns in cohort groups and demonstrate dynamic teaching. As a result, public school students in primary through 12th grade gain from the fluid and cooperative interaction of professional educator interns, clinical faculty, and other school personnel. The college uses information from the PEP and the experiences of partners to facilitate future involvement of other school districts in the region.

The PEP Program begins during summer school the first year. Three academic courses are offered on campus with one field experience. For the academic course work, the interns attend classes everyday for the first six weeks of the term. The seventh, eighth and ninth weeks interns work every day in year round schools (not the school district where they would spend the school year September-June). They return to the university for the final week of the summer session. Class assignments center on relating experiences

gained in the field with course content. An authentic assessment requirement, due at the completion of the school year, is introduced (The Professional Portfolio).

Before beginning fall term, the districts request state temporary substitute teaching certificates. These certificates permit interns to cover class if the lead teacher is involved in renewal projects, as well as for liability reasons. The advisory council decided to permit interns to substitute in the lead teacher's classroom if the interns are in the field on the day of the teachers absence, and if it does not interfere with university course requirements.

The interns start fall term in the classrooms where they will spend the academic year. By having no university responsibilities, interns become acclimated into the 'total ecology of the school'. University classes begin the third week. Some classes are held at the school.

The intern field experience is enhanced by a rotation schedule developed by the district lead teachers, which provided exposure to a variety of "specials." Included in the rotation are all special education classes, including MH, DH, LD, and SLD, in addition to Speech, Gifted, Art, Music, Physical Education, and Chapter I. Interns are also exposed to various age levels within the elementary building site.

During the first two weeks of December when the university class work is completed, a more extensive rotation schedule is implemented throughout the schools. Believing that the interns benefit from exposure to all student

age levels, interns are required to visit kindergarten, junior, and senior high classrooms. Secondary interns at the junior high are placed at the senior high for three days, and conversely the interns placed at the senior high are switched to the junior high for three days. Because the summer field experience is at the elementary level, it is assumed that the secondary interns are provided sufficient exposure to that age level.

A unique feature to the junior and senior high alternative field placement is the student shadowing experience. Each intern is assigned a public school student to follow throughout the course of a typical school day. Not only does this provide valuable insight for the interns into the lives of diverse student populations, it also provides much needed one-on-one attention to the individual public school students.

The remainder of the December field experience is spent in the original intern field placements. Advisory Councils at all buildings thought this to be an invaluable opportunity to orient interns into the typical "holiday craziness" all schools experience before winter break.

During winter term, the elementary interns have three full days of field experience per week on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. Some university courses, like those during fall quarter, are held at the building.

The interns have the week between winter and spring terms, referred to as Clinical Field Experience II, to plan and research their full time internship teaching. Beginning with the first week of spring term, interns

teach everyday, all day. Variations may occur, such as interns planning to teach as a team.

During the first five-week session of the following summer school term, interns put the finishing touches on their professional electronic PRAXIS. The second summer class required assists interns in inquiry topics for their upcoming entry year of teaching. Although interns receive certification by successfully completing the course work and internships, the master degree is awarded only after the successful execution of the inquiry project as well as demonstration of successful classroom teaching. The final project serves as accountability of the research, classroom teaching or related work fulfilling the instruction requirement. By keeping in contact during the interns' induction year, a support channel is provided.

Recent Licensure Requirements and Recent Program Changes

Ohio has recently adopted teacher licensure programs in the areas of Early Childhood Education (preK-3rd grade, ages 3 to 8), Middle Childhood Level (4th-9th grade, ages 8 to 15), and Adolescent/Young Adult (7th-12th grade, ages 12 to 21). After extensive program redesign and course development, the Early Childhood program will remain an undergraduate degree program while the Middle Childhood Level (MCL) and Adolescent/ Young Adult (AYA) will become post-baccalaureate programs. The MCL program will be used as an example of the changes being implemented and the way in which field experiences for students are presently envisioned.

The MCL program will serve preservice teachers who completed a baccalaureate degree with a dual major or areas of concentration. Students will take approximately 44 quarter hours in each of two areas of concentration namely science, mathematics, social sciences, and/or language arts. With this amount of course work required in two concentrations (88-90 hours out of 190 credits needed to graduate), the decision to offer the MCL undergraduate degree in education and to have students pursue the majority of their education courses at the graduate level seemed to be a logical choice. Figure 1 shows the courses and sequence for the PEP program for MCL students.

The year-long PEP field experiences are identified initially as practicum experiences and come prior to the teaching internship during the last quarter. Students attend courses during the first summer and when the school year begins they are placed in the classroom where they have their primary placement for the entire year. During the year, students also spend time in alternate classrooms, often in a different school to gain additional insights into other middle level educational settings. For MCL students this may mean rotating from a primary placement in a 7th grade classroom to a 4th grade classroom for a 2-3 week period twice during the year. The newly developed MCL program allows us to focus on identifying and developing collaborative ties with partnership schools that can meet the needs of our students while enriching the school community as well.

An Initial Field Experiences Survey

A survey was distributed to past and current Phase III student teachers to assess the impact of the present field experience sequence (see Figure 2). The survey examined students perceptions from both blocked Phase I programs (where classes and field experiences were taught concurrently at a school site,) and Phase I courses that met on campus with school field experiences. Another question asked respondents to describe and rate the quality of their experiences in the various school sites and how earlier field experiences helped prepare them for subsequent experiences in schools. Finally, respondents were asked how well prepared they felt to assume a full-time teaching position.

Fifty preservice teachers responded to the survey. Five identified themselves as early childhood, 31 were elementary level, and secondary and K-12 each had seven respondents. Eighteen were in the Phase I block site-based program and 32 were in the traditional campus-based courses. In response to question 5, "As you reflect on your Phase I experience(s), was it a beneficial experience in terms of preparing you for your Phase II and Phase III (student teaching) experiences?", 39 of 50 affirmed that their field experience(s) were beneficial. Two primary factors, the cooperating teacher and exposure to the "real world of the classroom" made the difference for these students. The remaining respondents stated that the cooperating teacher was a poor example, or that the placement did not meet their expectation in some other way such as being a mismatch with their teaching

area of concentration or that they did not get to teach or work with students as much as they desired.

Examination of data related to "preparedness to take their first full time teaching position" revealed that the students in the block program fared lower than expected. The informal feedback previously heard which served as the impetuous to conduct this survey centered on students in the Phase I block having a better early field experience and that the courses and classroom experiences on-site were very beneficial. As one respondent stated,

(Block) E. J. Brown - I had wonderful support within all of my phase experiences. Phase I gave me a better understanding of the hours and dedication required to be a successful teacher. I would highly recommend this for other students.

The data, however, did not support this information. Rather, 72% block respondents felt well prepared or adequately prepared to take on their first teaching position.

A higher proportion, 97% of the traditional, nonblock students responded that they felt well prepared or adequately prepared to assume their first teaching position. A nonblock respondent explained,

(NonBlock) - It gave me an insight as to how teaching and a classroom functions. It allowed me time to adjust to the changes I experienced by choosing teaching as my profession.

Overall the survey indicated that 86% of the respondents were positive as to their abilities to fill the role of a novice classroom teacher.

Implications of the Field Experiences Survey Data and Teacher Education Program Changes

All preservice teachers working with children from culturally diverse backgrounds, children of color, and children of poverty need to examine their perspectives. Teacher educators must seek to alter preservice teachers'

negative perceptions of schools with large percentages of students with cultures different than their own. They must familiarize students with schools in neighborhoods in which they have had no first hand experiences, and in schools that are perceived by the general population and many professional educators as undesirable places to teach. One way to address this problem is through early field experiences (Chance, Morris, & Rakes 1996).

Equity Issues, Multicultural Issues, and Changing Students' Perceptions. Many of our students come from rural Ohio and suburban backgrounds. Presently, WSU attracts few urban and/or minority students to our teacher education program. Therefore, these issues must be raised early on in the teacher education program so our students as well as the schools and children benefit most. Course work alone limits preservice teachers examination of their particular long-held beliefs and related behaviors. During field experience components, these issues come to light.

To better prepare teachers for urban settings is enabling the preservice students' learning about the community surrounding the school. The PEP is incorporating site visits to the fire and police stations, and other prominent community resources such as churches, as well as assignments to gather data on the ethnic and socioeconomic make-up of the area. Students are also to act as a social researcher of sorts by documenting newspaper accounts regarding events in the community and, if possible, interview five people who live there and who are involved with the school or with children in the neighborhood.

This more extensive view of the school and community allows preservice teachers to better understand the context of the larger picture of the students' lives both within the classroom and outside the school walls.

> A gap exists in teacher preparation programs between what teacher educators tell prospective teachers about the often difficult and diverse lived experiences of today's children and what teacher educators teach them about fashioning effective curriculum and instruction. This gap exists in the ethos of the classroom itself and its potential for either providing or denying feelings of safety, belonging, and acceptance to the children within it. . . . Unless teacher educators directly address the social context of the classroom by imbuing teachers with a mission to create classroom community and prepare them with the skills and understanding necessary to build and sustain it, their careful crafting of curriculum and instruction will fail (Breitborde 1996).

The PEP and the Phase I block advantages inherit in both urban school site placements are: 1.) the design involves cohort groups which promote support and 2.) the effectiveness of ensuing discussions help to overcome personal beliefs and aid the preservice teachers to grow as educators. The following quote illustrates the potential effects of the block and the cohort group support during the experience at this school site:

> *(Block) E. J. Brown - Every student should do Block Phase I. This is where a person can decide rationally about teaching. The time demands and the demands of teaching give the student a real look at what the future holds. The preparation for student teaching is second to none. Another plus is that you go through with a group of students to bounce everything off. It needs to be said again that I think it would be of great benefit for all students in education to take the Block Phase I.*

A supportive cohort group of fellow students is one constructive means for deeper and perhaps more honest examination and understanding of previously held beliefs about poverty, racial, and other issues related to students from differing cultural and experiential backgrounds.

Pairing of Preservice Teachers with Selected Inservice Teachers.

Another example of working with inservice teachers to better ensure that preservice teachers have constructive, positive field experiences that align with "best practices" is in our mathematics and science education program. Since 1996, WSU has conducted intensive four week summer workshops for classroom teachers focused on physics, life sciences, and mathematics content and pedagogy, coupled with extensive follow-up in classrooms during the school year. Ideally, we have then been pairing preservice teachers, particularly those with math and science concentrations, with these inservice teachers for Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III (student teaching) experiences. Some of these inservice teachers are in partnership schools, others are not, but regardless of the setting, we have been working toward ensuring higher quality field placements for a limited number of preservice teachers.

Selecting a Middle Childhood Level School. We also kept ideas of "best practices" in mind as we started the process of selecting a MCL school site. We sought out middle level schools in partnership districts that demonstrated to some degree the elements of effective middle schools as defined by the National Middle School Association (NMSA). The characteristics examined were:

- Curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory.
- Varied teaching and learning approaches.
- Assessment and evaluation that promotes learning.
- Flexible organizational structures.
- Programs and policies that foster health, wellness and safety.
- Comprehensive guidance and support services. (National Middle School Association, 1995).

We are developing a community of learners that will benefit children, teachers, preservice teachers, faculty, and the larger community. Our overarching goal is to continue to grow, build, and improve the MCL teacher education program while enhancing the quality of the middle level learners' education. Not just in mathematics and science, nor just Phase I Block, but rather to implement these types of elements into school site partnership efforts that build this entire community of learners. We believe better teachers and learners will be produced by supporting "Best Practices" implementation in field experiences at exemplary MCL school sites. NCATE (1998) preservice teachers need to benefit students in public schools prior to completing their teacher preparation program.

From the University Perspective. Another important implication from the university perspective is one of allocation of resources. Resources here are defined as both issues of funding as well as how that translates into faculty time and responsibilities. Working more closely in school settings requires more "manpower" and, therefore, more time intensiveness. This means that traditional definition of faculty roles must be redefined and clarified. Simple things like scheduling classes or finding a parking space to make on campus meetings must be thought through carefully. For programs like the PEP (a graduate level with additional state subsidy) the funding issue is less critical, but the need for external funding still exists. Our partnership advisory councils provide feedback to us about what works well and what

needs attention. The following list summarizes the lessons learned by the WSU partners' analysis of the PEP.

Lessons Learned

1. Always lead with a Pilot Program to test the waters.
2. Have the key players, top administration as well as the front line "worker bees" at the table when designing a formal agreement. This agreement serves as a framework for the partnering to come.
3. All partners need to value the partnership and be committed. Partners need to see that the partnership is in the best interest of students in the classroom and to the teaching profession as a whole.
4. The importance of clear, ongoing communication is a lesson we are still working to perfect.
5. As new personnel become involved with the program, they need to understand and agree with the historical perspectives. Joint ownership must result between new and prior members.
6. Interns highly valuing all field internship work.
7. Teachers validated that interns made major differences in PreK-6 students' lives.
8. Teachers are motivated to undertake extensive renewal activities.
9. Teachers verify that they are more focused on personal excellence when entrusted with an apprenticing future educator.
10. University faculty experience the real world of day-to-day teaching when working on-site.
11. Intern problems need to be addressed quickly through concern conferences.
12. Interns bond with each other as support groups.
13. Interns must identify financial resources and support systems for the year.
14. Interns and clinical faculty need due process procedures for disagreements/concerns.
15. Teachers desire input into university curriculum and practice.
16. More university attention is needed at the school site.
17. Flexibility and civility must be stressed in summer course work.

Conclusions

Our field experience adventures in the last few years serve as the primer for preK-12 teacher preparation. We must continue to learn. Keeping growth as a goal allows for flexibility and innovation, which are needed attributes for addressing the inevitable challenges ahead as we refine the PEP,

as well as our present undergraduate program. With the new Ohio licensure programs, reflection and learning from our new attempts will assist us as we discover the snags and whitewater that will invariably be encountered along the journey.

Michael Fullan calls for the "Ready, Fire, Aim" approach, because movement forward, even without all of the answers or all of the pieces in place, is necessary. Otherwise, progress would be stifled, the plan would be derailed, and meeting changing student needs would be left unobtained. Our advancement formula is: to pilot, re-examine, adjust, and proceed forward. This formula fostered the current success achieved with the PEP in particular.

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Figure 1. Overview of Middle Childhood Level PEP Sequence and Courses

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD LEVEL
GRADUATE - PROFESSIONAL EDUCATORS PROGRAM
(PEP)

May 27, 1998

If students have completed the undergraduate Pre-Professional Education sequence, they proceed to term Summer B.

Phase One

SUMMER A	OR	UNDERGRADUATE#
ED 602B (4) Ed. in a Culturally Diverse Soc: Middle Level		ED 301B (5) Teaching in a Culturally Diverse Society: Middle Level
ED 621B (3) Human Development: Middle Level		ED 303B (5) Psy'l & Soc. Foundations: Middle Level
EDS 633B (3) Learning Diff: Diversity in Middle Level		EDS 333B (3) Learning Differences: Introduction to Diversity in Middle Level
ED 612B (2) Practicum I: Middle School		ED 221B (1) Practicum I: Middle School ED 223B (1) Practicum II: MiddleSchool
TOTAL HOURS: 12		(TOTAL HOURS: 15)

Phase Two

SUMMER B

ED 645B	(6)	Inquiry and Assessment: Middle Level
ED 622B	(6)	Technological Instruction and Integrated Methods: Middle Level
ED 732	(3)	Principles and Practices of Middle Level Education

FALL TERM

ED 606B	(5)	Reading & Literacy Instruction I: Middle Level Setting
ED 600B	(6)	Classroom Management and Learning Theory: Middle Level
ED 717B	(5)	Instruction in Word Study: Phonics-Middle Level
ED 614B	(2)	Practicum II: Middle School

TOTAL HOURS 18

WINTER TERM

ED 607B	(5)	Reading & Literacy Instruction II: Middle Level	
ED 616B	(1)	Practicum III: Middle Level	
(Choose Two Methods Courses)			
ED 731B	(6)	Integrated Middle Level Science Methods	(and/or)
ED 610	(6)	Middle Level Mathematics Methods	(and/or)
ED 629B	(6)	Middle Level Social Studies Methods	(and/or)
ED 624B	(6)	Middle Level Literature, Speech, and Drama	

TOTAL HOURS 18

Phase Three

SPRING TERM

ED 642B (15) Internship: Middle Level Student Teaching TOTAL HOURS. 15+1

*COMPLETE ED 645 and ED 622

ED 771 (1) INTERN ASSESSMENT SEMINAR TAKEN WHEN PROJECT IS COMPLETED.

B after the course number identifies a section specifically as Middle Childhood.

TOTAL PROGRAM= 79 HRS.

Figure 2. Survey of Prior Field Experiences

Field Experience Survey
Wright State University
Office of Professional Field Experiences

Please respond to the following questions accurately and completely.
Last four digits of your SSN _____ (for record keeping purposes only)

Circle the level of your teaching certification:
Early Childhood Elementary Secondary K-12

1. Were your Phase I field experiences in the Block Program?
Yes No*
* If you were not in the Phase I Block proceed to Questions 5, 6, 7 and/or 8 as appropriate.

2. Where did you do your Phase I Block Experience?
____ E. J. Brown ____ Shilohview
____ Five Points other school: _____
What quarter? _____

3. Did you develop an initial portfolio to document your experience?
Yes No

4. Briefly describe your Phase I experience. The grade level, overall classroom environment, your involvement with the students and so on. Please number & use the back side as needed.

5. As you reflect on your Phase I experience(s), was it a beneficial experience in terms of preparing you for your Phase II and Phase III (student teaching) experiences?
Yes No

6. If you responded Yes above, elaborate as to how your Phase I block experience(s) better prepare you for later field experiences?

7. If you responded No above, elaborate as to how your Phase I block experience(s) could have better prepared you for later field experiences?

8. How prepared do you feel now to assume your first full time teaching position?

5 Well prepared 4 Adequately prepared 3 Somewhat prepared
2 Not fully prepared 1 Unprepared